

## HARUT AND MARUT

In Surah ii. 95 foll. we read:

And when there came to them (the Jews) an Apostle from Allah confirming what was in their possession, a section of those who had been given the Book flung the Book of Allah behind their backs, as though they knew not; (96) and followed what the demons recited over the kingdom of Solomon, and Solomon did not disbelieve, but the demons disbelieved, teaching men sorcery, and what was revealed to the two angels (or kings) in Babylon, Harut and Marut, and they twain taught no one until they said, We are only a probation, and disbelieve thou not; and they would learn from them twain that whereby they would separate between a man and his wife, and they harm no one thereby save by permission of Allah, and they learn what harms them and profits them not, and verily they know that whoso purchaseth it hath no share in the latter world.

In the recently published *Koranische Untersuchungen* of Dr. J. Horowitz many suggestions are recorded for the identification of Harut and Marut. I venture to propose another, which, so far as I know, has not yet been made.

In a work by Zosimus of Panopolis, a writer of uncertain date, yet certainly earlier than the Prophet's time, there occurs the following passage:<sup>1</sup> the author recommends his sister *to offer sacrifices and utter invocations not such as are nutritious and kindly, but those deleterious and murderous ones which Membres addressed to the king of Jerusalem Solomon, and still more those which Solomon wrote of his own wisdom.*

There is evidently great similarity between these passages. Two kinds of spells are distinguished, and in the case of the first the Greek of Zosimus and the Arabic of the Koran exhibit similar ambiguity. It is not clear whether they were communicated to Solomon, or uttered against him. The context in both cases somewhat favors the former view. The phrase "recite over," in the Koran regularly means *recite* to a person. Further, the Jews in the time of Josephus possessed collections of spells which were ascribed to Solomon, and the historian had witnessed their efficacy.<sup>2</sup> The Greek of Zosimus seems to distinguish spells which Solomon had learned from Membres and those which he had himself invented. Yet in both cases grammar on the whole favors the view that the spells were used by the demons to Solomon's detriment. If the former view is right, the words *recited over the kingdom of Solomon* must mean "recited to Solomon's majesty", and what follows saves Solomon's reputation by the assurance that any infidelity which the spells contained was due to the demons, not to Solomon himself. Presently the

reputation of Harut and Marut is saved by the assurance that they confessed to their pupils that their teaching was probation only.

Solomon's connection with demons is, of course, based on Ecclesiastes ii. 8, where among the objects procured by the author there figure the difficult words *shiddah we-shiddoth*.

These were interpreted by Some of the Jews as "a male and a female demon."<sup>3</sup> The *Membres*, who in the passage of Zosimus addresses spells to Solomon, is doubtless the *Mambres* of the Vulgate of 2 Timothy iii. 8, where the Greek has *Like as Iannes and Iambres withstood Moses, so do these withstand the truth; men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith*. From the Gospel of Nicodemus<sup>4</sup> we learn that these were the sorcerers who tried to rival the miracles of Moses. According to this work "the Egyptians regarded the two as gods". The statement that they were the Sorcerers of Exodus vii. 12 is also found in Rabbinical literature,<sup>5</sup> in which the names of the two vary very much: *Ianni, Iohanni, Ionos, lamres, Iambres, Iomros, Memre*. The name of *Iannes* is found in a work which is likely to be somewhat earlier than the Second Epistle to Timothy, viz. the "Natural History" of Pliny the Elder; he mentions a system of magic based upon the Jews Moses, Iannes, and Lotapeas, some thousands of years later than Zoroaster.<sup>6</sup> Clearly we must not be over strict in matters of chronology in dealing with *Iannes* and *Iambres*.

It is noteworthy that the Jewish tradition follows the Greek or Latin forms of these names. For there can be little doubt that they are in origin the *waya'an wayomar* "and he answered and said" of Numbers xxiii. 12. The Rabbis held that they were the two sons of Balaam, called "his two lads" in Numbers xxii. 22. Numbers xxiii. 11 ends, *Thou hast blessed them BRK*, a group which here means blessing, but might be rendered "thy son". Taking this with the beginning of verse 12, we get, "thy son, both Iannes and Iambres".

Comparison of the passages of the Koran and Zosimus gives us the right to identify *Marut* with *Iambres*, or one of the varieties of his name. As we have seen, one of the forms is *Iombros*, another *Memre*; another mentioned by Thilo is *Iamares*. *Marut* is at least as near to these as is *Yahya* to *Ioannes* or *Iochanan*. But it follows that *Harut* is *Iannes*, and this identification will not seem farfetched to any one who compares the Koranic *Talut* and *Jalut* with Saul-Gideon and Goliath, and the Koranic *Yajuj* and *Matjuj* with Gog and Magog. The Prophet evidently favored the form *fa'ul* for foreign proper names and the termination *ut*. Horovitz thinks *Talut* for Saul was suggested by the height of the king, since *Tala* is Arabic for "he was long". This may be right, though the Koran does not appear to be acquainted with Saul's dimensions. We shall see presently that the names of both *Harut* and *Marut* lend themselves to etymologies which suit their functions.

What is clear in the first place is that Iannes and Iambres were high in the profession of sorcery, and the Koranic text implies that Harut and Marut taught this subject. Pliny's coupling of Moses with Iannes as founders of a system of sorcery will not seem strange to one who reads the dialogue which the Rabbis put in the mouths of these persons. Iannes and Iambres tell Moses that bringing sorcery into Egypt is - to substitute an English proverb for theirs - "bringing coals to Newcastle"; the Egyptians had too much of it to care for more. They regard Moses as a colleague, who has brought his wares to an overstocked market.

Like the Membres of Zosimus, Harut and Marut deal in deleterious spells; and indeed in Exodus the magicians can produce some of the same plagues as Moses, but are unable to do good. The Koranic couple are located not in Egypt, but in Babylon; both countries were notoriously headquarters of magic. Lucan in his *locus classicus* about magic, in order to emphasize the power of the Thessalian witch, states that though Persean Babylon and mysterious Memphis unroll all the archives of the ancient Magi, she can outdo them.

Otherwise Harut and Marut have risen in rank as compared with Iannes and Iambres. If the word which describes them is to be read (*al-malikaini*) "the two kings" they may derive their royalty from the honor accorded to the Magi of Matthew ii, who in the Roman Church are regularly called the Three Kings. And indeed Babylon is a more likely home for kings than for angels. Yet their claim to be angels (*al-malakaini*) is on the whole the stronger. The form *Membres* or *Memre* is identical with the Aramaic phrase meaning "Word," which the Rabbis use as a paraphrase for the Divine name, but for which they occasionally substitute "angel".<sup>7</sup> Hence we get the equation Membres = angel And his promotion entails that of his colleague.

Secondly the Koranic text speaks of "*what was revealed to*" them, using the term for divine communications to prophets. The spells then are exalted into revelations. The Jews might have retorted, and probably did retort, that following matter which had been revealed to angels was a praiseworthy proceeding; in the New Testament they are upbraided for not doing this.<sup>8</sup> Hence it was necessary to make these angels warn their students that the spells were communicated for the sole purpose of probation. We can trace in this text the gradual building up of the Koran, whether by the Prophet himself or by its editors. The concession that the spells were the work of Solomon, or had been revealed to angels, would have rendered the charge against the Jews futile; hence what is given with one hand is taken away with the other. The process is a familiar one. The most notable case is the admission of the authority of the Old and New Testaments, followed by the assertion that the copies of both were so corrupt as to be wholly untrustworthy.

The spells were, as has been seen, deleterious in character, and particular mention is made of those which were intended to produce matrimonial discord. This specialty is clearly deduced from the form which the name of the second angel had assumed, Marut, which is like *mumarat* or *mira'* "disputation". It is observable that the Biblical Miriam, whose name is by some derived from this root, endeavors to separate Moses from his Ethiopian wife (Numbers xii. 1). This narrative is so appropriate that it is likely to have influenced the Koranic passage. In Aramaic *herta*, plural *heratha*, means "quarrel"; and this fact may have helped to transform Iannes into Harut.

The passage is evidence of a matter recorded in the tradition, and which is in itself highly probable, viz., that the Jews, when their relations with the Prophet became strained, endeavored to deal with him by sorcery.<sup>9</sup> The charge brought against them is that when the Book of Allah, which claimed to be in agreement with the revelation which had been given them, was put before them, they pretended not to recognize it, and instead resorted to the use of spells, which had the authority of Solomon, Harut and Marut. According to Tabari the first child was born to the Moslems of Medinah fourteen months after the Prophet's arrival<sup>10</sup>, and the Jews boasted that their spells had produced sterility. They were more frequently employed to induce fertility; but the science of contraries is the same, and a queen in a Euripidean play complains that another woman's magic has rendered her barren.

The Koranic passage terminates with a curious Hebraism, which is introduced into what is on the whole a correct citation from the Talmud. In its list of persons who have no "share in the future life, that work includes those who employ spells for the cure of disease;<sup>11</sup> and the Hebrew word for "share" *kheleq* is reproduced in the Koran. To the Jews, prophecy was the utterance of "the Spirit of Holiness"; and the language of Holiness being Hebrew, they were unlikely to recognize the authenticity of oracles in any other idiom. There are some curious traces in the Koran of endeavors on the part of the Medinese Jews to conduct their controversy with the Prophet at least to some extent in that language. In Surah iv. 48 "some of those who have Judaized" are charged with intentionally using incorrect expressions, and some examples are given. One is "we hear and disobey" (*wa'asaina*) in lieu of "we hear and obey". The clue to this is furnished by ii. 87, where the Israelites are said to have given this reply when the Sinaitic code was delivered to them. In Deuteronomy v. 24 what they say is "we shall hear and do" (*wa'asinu*), where the Hebrew word has evidently been misunderstood by the Prophet. They said to him in Hebrew "see now" (*r'e na*), which he mistook for an Arabic word, meaning "observe us", for which he prefers a synonym. It may be suspected that some unintelligible words, which are censured in iv. 48 as an improper substitute for "hear thou", represent Hebrew.

It may be assumed that the Jewish sorcerers claimed that their spells were the compositions of Solomon; that he got them from demons is likely to be the Prophet's conjecture. Some other source than the Jews of Medinah is likely to have supplied the names which became Harut and Marut, but the fact that Iannes is known to the Latin writers Pliny and Apuleius, and Iannes with Iambres figures in an apocryphal Gospel, as in the work of Zosimus, indicates that their fame had spread over a wide area. And this is confirmed by the employment in the Jewish collections of forms of the names which must come from Greek or Latin sources, their true origin having been forgotten.

The spells which the Jews of Medinah employed are probably lost; but in the collections of papyri, which have been unearthed in Egypt and published in Europe, not a few in the Greek language are to be found which probably are similar in character and content.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Collection des Alchimistes Grecs of Berthelot ii. 244. I owe the reference to Professor Ferguson of Aberdeen.

<sup>2</sup> Antiquities viii. ii. §5.

<sup>3</sup> B. Gittin 68 a (Rashi).

<sup>4</sup> Thilo Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti, i 552.

<sup>5</sup> The passages are collected in Buxtorf's Talmudic Lexicon.

<sup>6</sup> Book xxx. §11. I fancy Lotapeas is the Hebrew totaphoth "phylacteries".

<sup>7</sup> See Geiger's Urschrift und Uebersetzungen p. 343.

<sup>8</sup> Acts vii. 53.

<sup>9</sup> See Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, 9. 231.

<sup>10</sup> Leiden ed. i. 1264.

<sup>11</sup> B. Sanhedrin, §11.